

N.J. County (Cunningham articles)

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NEW JERSEY REFERENCE

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BERGEN COUNTY

Rapidly developing area owes much
to George Washington Bridge link

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Color photo by Corbitt.

JERSEY GATEWAY

Bustling Bergen Got Start From Dutch and Boost From New Bridge

BY JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

SO MUCH of Bergen County's story is right out in the open that there is a temptation to sum it up like this: From genuine Dutch Colonial to modified ranch house in three centuries. Add the George Washington Bridge and the Indian names which dot the county; vital keys to knowing Bergen are close at hand.

Dutch Colonial homes and the George Washington Bridge are very much part of the same heritage. The Dutch who came in the 17th Century and built houses with two-foot brick walls and strong gambrel roofs sought and found a place to live. Through the decades others have had the same search end in a Bergen home. The bridge merely quickened the search and made it easy for many, many thousands to live in Bergen and to earn the means in New York.

Indeed, George Washington Bridge, started in 1927 and finished in 1931, may well be said to rest on a founda-

(This is the second of a series of articles dealing with New Jersey's 21 counties, sketching their past and present with, now and then, a peek into their future. The counties will be considered in alphabetical order each week. Next Sunday Burlington County.)

tion begun in 1618. That was the year adventurers and fortune-seekers of the Dutch East India Co. established a trading post in Bergen. Across the river the Dutch set up Fort Amsterdam on the Island of Manhattan.

One of Bergen County's all-time great citizens welcomed the Dutch. He arrived ahead of the fur trappers by the simple expedient of being born on the banks of Overpeck (Awapaugh) Creek in the year 1577. As Oratam, the great sagamore and sachem of the Hackensack Indians, his decision to live in peace with the usurpers of his land eased the way for settlement of Bergen.

ORATAM had help from the Dutch in his peaceful intentions. Mrs. Sarah Kierstede, wife of a Dutch doctor on the Island of Manhattan, took the trouble to learn the Indian language and as an interpreter helped conclude treaties. Oratam, in gratitude, granted



Air view of Hackensack, Bergen County seat and once thriving port of call for ocean-going sailing ships.

her title in 1638 to 2,120 choice acres on the banks of the Hackensack.

Captain David Pietersen de Vries, adventurer and mariner of note, settled on the banks of the Hackensack River in 1640 and quickly earned the trust of the Indians. His interest in the rich fertile lands west of the Palisades was dominated by the philosophy that the panthers and wolves in the Bergen woods were more dangerous than the Indians.

Unfortunately, not all the Dutch sought peace. Brutal massacre of Indians in Bergen County touched off bloodletting in 1643 which not even the wisdom of Oratam and the sympathy of de Vries could stem. Warfare continued almost until 1664, the year the English took Fort Amsterdam (New York) from the Dutch.

Colonization proceeded quickly in Bergen under the English, mainly because they dealt in friendly and just fashion with the tribes of Oratam. The great Indian was nearing the end of his days—he was too old to go to Newark to sign a treaty in 1666—but when he died in 1669 his life span of 92 years had seen peace come to the land he loved.

PARADOXICALLY, neither the Dutch or the English founded Bergen's first permanent colony. That honor fell to David des Marest, a French Huguenot who objected to helping support the Dutch Church in New York. He sailed his family up the Hackensack to what is now New Milford in 1677 and settled down to farming and religious peace.

Six years later (1683) Bergen's boundaries were fixed between the Hudson and Hackensack rivers from the New York province line to Newark Bay. Settlers pushed westward to the Ramapo Mountain by 1700 (enough lived in Yaughpaugh, now Oakland, in 1700 to

require the services of a circuit-riding dominie). Then, in 1709, Essex County ceded New Barbadoes Township to Bergen and the thriving village of Hackensack became county seat.

Hackensack, port of call for ocean-going ships and center of a rich agricultural section, boomed. New settlers built splendid brick and red sandstone homes, shops lined the shaded streets and stagecoaches regularly brought new faces and the mail. Life in the strict colonial village centered in the stately Dutch Reformed Church on the green, built in 1696. The old Demarest heart-stone bearing that date is still in the east wall of the church.

SO well established was Hackensack that in 1767 the State Legislature debated the merits of the village along with New Brunswick for the location of Queens College (Rutgers). The vote ended in a deadlock, with Bergen County member Dr. David Wilson scrupulously not voting. New Brunswick won on the tie-breaking vote of the Governor and Dr. Wilson returned to Hackensack to establish in 1768 the widely renowned Washington Institute to work "for the preservation of the morals of youth" (and to educate them, too).

Bergen's Dutch and English lived harmoniously, respecting one another and respecting other nationalities who came to the shores of the Hackensack. Ramapo, Saddle and Passaic rivers in the 18th Century. Their knowledge of persecution in their native lands forged a common bond against the British in 1776. They fully knew from the first crackling of guns at Lexington that the British would find Bergen the gateway to New Jersey.

They had not long to wait...

Lord Cornwallis led 5,000 British regulars and Hessians across the Hudson in early November, 1776; over-

whelmed the garrison at Fort Constitution (Fort Lee) and sent the Continentals reeling across Bergen to the little bridge over the Hackensack at New Bridge. Cornwallis failed to follow up his advantage, in what historians regard as a colossal blunder. One writer declares that "the crossing of the Delaware was made safe by the crossing of the Hackensack a month earlier." Washington regrouped his ragged and despairing troops in Hackensack and led them across New Jersey to prepare for the inspiring smash at Trenton on Christmas night, 1776.

No great battles engulfed Bergen but the county felt the Revolution constantly. Foraging parties stripped its fields and orchards. Washington was often in the county and in 1780 British and Hessian troops drove the county government from Hackensack to Yaughpaugh. A disastrous raid in 1778 cost the lives of several Americans when a British party caught an American regiment sleeping in the old Blauvelt red-stone house and barns at River Vale and, following orders of Maj. Gen. "No Flint" Grey, bayoneted many Continentals to death in the infamous "Baylor Massacre."

One important defection from the American cause was that of John Zabriskie, who built a pretentious home at New Bridge in 1739 and grew prosperous from his big grist mill and his extensive dock on the river. He remained loyal to King George and, in retaliation, his home was taken from him by patriots and presented in gratitude to Gen. von Steuben (who never occupied it) for his services in the American cause.

WAR wounds healed quickly. Peace revived tilling of the Bergen fields and the county's farmers moved to the fore. There was some industry, but

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GATEWAY TO JERSEY



Junction of Hackensack and Overpeck rivers, with Route 6 in background. Chief Oratam granted Mrs. Sarah Kierstede 2,120 choice acres in this area in 1638 for aid as Indian language interpreter.

Color photos by Tuttle.



Steuben House at New Bridge, taken in 1890 and presented to General Steuben.



"Demarest" house at New Milford, the permanent settlement, started by David Demarest.



Striking air view of Bergen's busy Teterboro Airport, in one of the county's booming industrial districts.

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mainly it consisted of such strictly local enterprises as grist mills, smithys and saw mills powered by the county's many streams. An exception was sporadic copper mining in North Arlington, started in 1719 by the accidental discovery of a vein of ore on Arent Schuyler's farm.

Up Park Ridge way, John Campbell and his sons made plenty of wampum—literally. John took over an abandoned mill in 1775 to make the Indian money from sea shells. He found wampum made good hard American dollars. Even John Jacob Astor came to the Campbells for the Indian wherewithal to conduct his fur-trading ventures. Indian traders from the country over looked to Park Ridge for wampum until 1889, when the Indians decided American dollars had come to stay. Wampum was no mere Park Ridge shell game, however, while it lasted.

Agriculture, nonetheless, was Bergen's big 19th Century enterprise. Even the slicing away of sizable chunks to add to Passaic County in 1837 and the creation of Hudson County from Bergen in 1840 failed to cut appreciably into farm income.

And small wonder, since (if you would believe the chroniclers of the day) the lush soil yielded pears a pound in weight, celery more than three feet long and pumpkins weighing a hundred pounds (give or take a



n from Tory by patriots during Rev-
von Steuben for his active help.



is reminder of Bergen's first per-
des Marest. It was built in 1678.

few inches or pounds). Hackensack
melons and "Chestnut Ridge" peaches
brought further fame to Bergen
growers.

Above all, there were strawber-
ries...

STARTED about 1800, the strawberry
trade reached a peak just before the
Civil War. The period was fabulous,
an era when buyers, sellers and pick-
ers congregated in the inns at the
strawberry centers in Ramsey and Al-
lendale. Four to eight of the Erie Rail-
road's specially painted white boxcars
left Allendale and Ramsey each morn-
ing in season. Mostly, however, the
strawberries went by the wagonload
over rutted roads to New York, Pater-
son and Newark. The last week of
June, 1858, for example, saw 1,100
wagonloads carrying 1,500,000 baskets
of the ripe red fruit trundle through
the toll gates of the Bergen turnpike
on the way to market. The strawberry
rash faded quickly after the Civil War,
disappeared by 1880.

Farm prosperity brought demands
for improved roads, but the railroads
—led by the Erie and the Paterson and
Hudson River — supplied the needed
fast movement in the 1830s and 1840s.
By the middle 1850s John Van Brunt
and associates had pushed the North-
ern Railroad up the valley west of the
Palisades. The New Jersey & New
York, the West Shore and the N. Y.,



Lovely Graydon Pool in Ridgewood is typical of Bergen County's many facilities for public recreation.



This picturesque road, curling down Palisades, leads to Alpine Ferry. Bit of New York is in background.

Susquehanna & Western followed
later.

The railroads gave sudden birth to
a new type of businessman, one who
ever since has risen and fallen in good
times and bad in Bergen—the real
estate man, quick to envision paradise
in fields "within five minutes' walk of
the station" (which he hoped would be
built).

BERGEN'S first official real estate
development came in 1854 when Dr.
Carl Klein led a group of New York
Germans to a hillside north of Boiling
Springs (Rutherford). They bought 140
acres, split it up into 270 plots and
appropriately enough called it Carl-
stadt (Carl's Town). Nearby, at Boiling
Springs, Floyd W. Thompkins began
buying and selling home plots in 1858.

The Civil War temporarily shelved
the building boom, partially because
of the upset times and partially be-
cause Bergen split in bitter wrangling
over the war.

Much of the bitterness was occa-
sioned by the tight political hold Garry
Ackerson's Democratic political ma-
chine held on the county. Strong anti-
war sentiment, combined with the
Ackerson machine, resulted in Abra-
ham Lincoln losing to Breckinridge in
1860, 2,112 to 1,455. In 1861, Copper-
heads threatened bodily harm to a
newspaper editor who supported the
Union cause. Finally, however, both

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Saddle River, in northern Bergen, provides scenes of bucolic beauty.

BERGEN

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political parties realized that the war was bigger than themselves and in their political truce let the Union rather than Bergen benefit from their fighting.

Political excitement was about all that the agricultural county enjoyed, if the words of one editor be true. He rued the "monotony of bucolic existence" in Bergen and cried that "lawyers cannot incite the people to contention during the six days nor the preacher keep them awake on the seventh."

Then "outside folks" flocked in to stay...

J. WYMAN JONES, a lawyer, saw possibilities in the golden orchard country in the rolling land where Englewood now exists. His city friends came, settled on the land near the Northern Railroad and commuted to New York. Local stores failed to meet early demands, it is said, and commuters from Englewood in the 1860s carried market baskets to and from the train each day.

Another newcomer, William Walter Phelps, made Teaneck his home in 1865 and within 13 years after he settled in the old Garrit Brinkerhoff home on Teaneck Bridge he and his Palisades Land Co. owned 4,000 acres as far east as the Palisades and north to Alpine. Phelps became one of Bergen's noted before his death in 1894. He personally defrayed the cost of 30 miles of road, paid half the cost of his town's railroad station and ordered the planting of more than a half-million trees—plus getting elected to Congress and serving as Minister to Austria and Germany.

Out along the Passaic River, Gilbert D. Bogart and Henry Marsellus bought property and laid out a town called "East Passaic" until James A. Garfield was elected President in November, 1880. The next day Bogart strode into the office of the editor of the Passaic newspaper and announced: "From today on we're Garfield. No more East Passaic." There was no more East Passaic.

OTHER towns and villages lost old Dutch and Indian names under the influence of the new arrivals. So much so, in fact, that in 1872 the Bergen County Historical Society, according to contemporary newspaper stories, sought to prevent "the old historic names of the county from being blotted out by namby-pamby sentimental 'Ridges,' 'Woods' and 'Parks.'"

(But Bergen grew away from its early names, although enough of the Indian names have survived to remind the visitor that Oratam also slept here—such as Kinderkamack road, Hohokus, Pascack, Mahwah, Wyckoff, plus, of course, Hackensack.)

Summer folks flocked to such popular spots as Norwood Hotel and Edgewater's Buena Vista Hotel to enjoy Bergen's well-advertised healthful air. They were of course desirable. Somewhat less welcome (but apparently tolerated) were "hordes of New York ruffians of the lowest degree" who came to the illegal cockfights and the illegal horse race betting rooms in the area surrounding Fort Lee. More than 300,000 visitors came to Fort Lee by ferry in 1879 and a goodly number of them didn't come just for the Jersey air, enforcement officials admitted, possibly setting the tone for more recent goings-on in Bergen.

But there were sweet, dreamy hours to be enjoyed at Fort Lee Park Hotel and there were pleasant times at Clahan's Hotel in Edgewater. Francis R. Tillou's estate, "Tilliedudlum," attracted New York's Very Important



Bergen County, founded in 1682 by East Jersey Proprietors, got name from Dutch word for "hills." Passaic County was formed from part of Bergen in 1837, Hudson cut from county in 1840.

(including Boss Tweed). Above all, the Octagon Building at Edgewater was a mecca for the fun seekers. Up county, the Park Ridge Town Improvement Association ran a big amusement center—and used the proceeds to defray the costs of streets and sidewalks and to pay the salary of the boy who lighted the oil lamps in the streets.

AN acute attack of what one writer called "boroughitis" seized Bergen County in the 1890s, mainly because the Legislature voted a new borough act which made each township a separate school district (wherein taxpayers were obliged to pay, pro rata, existing debts of old school districts, plus future school debts). There was one very important clause—the act did not apply to boroughs, towns, villages and cities.

Any wonder, then, that between January 23 and December 18, 1894, Bergen gave birth to 26 new boroughs? Any wonder that Bergen County today has 70 separate municipalities in its 233 square miles?

The changes often took place in charged atmospheres. Bitter words

were exchanged. A few noses were bloodied. Balloting was close, school taxes or no school taxes. Of all the misunderstanding, however, none was more cruel than that visited upon one Russell Jones, whose borderline house burned down while firemen of Bogota and Teaneck argued over who had a right to extinguish the fire.

Real estate men went on apace. They ran special trains and gave hot chowder and lukewarm music to induce 1890 settlers to Bergen. Their cause was boosted along in 1900 when plans were drawn and approved in Washington for a double-decked \$60,000,000 bridge over the Hudson to West New York. The bridge wasn't built, but population in Bergen zoomed from 78,441 in 1900 to 139,002 in 1910. In 1905 a New York newspaper summed it up: "Alas, the days of the Bergen farmer are numbered. Land worth \$1,000 to \$5,000 per acre is too valuable for growing cabbage." Newcomers bought into the cabbage fields.

MAGNETIC names among those Bergen newcomers were attracted to Fort Lee, motion picture capital of the

world from 1907 to World War I. Pearl White emoted much of her anguished series, "The Perils of Pauline," in the rugged Palisades. Edwin S. Porter made "Rescued From an Eagle's Nest" in 1908 with young David W. Griffith in the role of a mountaineer. Mack Sennett and his pie throwers arrived at Fort Lee in 1908 and in 1909 the winsome Mary Pickford made her debut in "The Violin Maker of Cremona."

Fort Lee enjoyed its position as the film capital. Samuel Goldwyn, William Fox and Carl Laemmle pioneered in the town and stars like Rudolph Valentino, Lon Chaney, Charlie Chaplin, Fatty Arbuckle, Theda Bara, Lillian Gish and Marie Dressler faced Fort Lee cameras. It was a sad day for the livery stables, the hotels, the restaurants and the town extras when movieland moved to Hollywood. Richard Barthelmess and Ina Claire made Fort Lee's last important picture in 1923.

Bergen County took World War I pride in Camp Merritt near Cresskill, from where more than a half-million young men left for France. It suffered wartime anguish on a bitter night in January, 1917, when the sprawling plant of the Canadian Car & Foundry Co. at Kingsland erupted in violent explosion. German agents, they said, used that means to stop the \$83,000,000 order of shells destined for Russia.

EXPLOSION, camp, movies, real estate booms, strawberries, Revolution, colonization—those are the elements in Bergen's past. Yet, probably no Bergen happening was more important than that on October 24, 1931, when Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt of New York and Governor Morgan F. Larson of New Jersey jointly snipped a ribbon to open \$80,000,000 George Washington Bridge.

Bergen had dreamed of a bridge since 1834, when New York and New Jersey legislatures first set up a commission to study the spanning of the Hudson. Now, just three years short of a century later, the bridge was ready.

Ready, too, were the real estate men; Bergen's phenomenal growth since can be attributed both to the bridge and the successful selling of Bergen as a place in which to live. Today home developments spread far and wide, edged up tight to the old stone Dutch houses and the disappearing farms.

Industry is important in Bergen, of course (and many of the development-swelled towns would give anything for a couple of nice clean little factories to help ease taxes). Mainly industry is concentrated along the Passaic (Fair Lawn, Garfield, Lodi), near the important Teterboro Airport (Wood-Ridge, South Hackensack and Moonachie) and along the Hudson, particularly at Edgewater (called the spot "where homes and industry blend"). Textiles, airplane motors, automobiles, paper, chemicals and widely varied metal products and delicate instruments flow from Bergen industry. Research laboratories and offices of erstwhile New York firms are locating in Bergen. All are a rich source of employment and county prosperity.

Still, Bergen must be looked upon essentially as "home"—the place to live in residential comfort, on income gained in New York.

Home—that ever has been Bergen's destiny.

COVER PHOTO

Opening of George Washington Bridge across the Hudson in 1931 brought Bergen its biggest boom. Here is air view of approaches on Jersey side.



"The Rock" at Glen Rock is 20-ton reminder of legendary meeting place of Bergen area Indians before coming of white men.